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Senate committee report admits problems with China FTA negotiations, say public interest groups

“The Senate Inquiry report into Australia’s relationship with China acknowledges many of the critical issues about human rights, labour rights and the environment raised by community organisations,” Dr Patricia Ranald, Principal Policy Officer at the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network said today.

“The report shows worsening environmental damage and serious violations of human rights and labour standards in China. The report is critical of Australia’s human rights dialogues with China, noting that the process takes place behind closed doors is further masked by bland statements about progress (p. xxix),” said Dr Ranald.

“The report notes that a timid approach to these issues could do more damage than good to Australia’s relations with China (p. xxviii),” added Dr Ranald. “The report urges the Australian government to take every opportunity, including the FTA negotiations, to raise its objections to these violations more forcefully” (p.xxx).”

“There is a contrast between the report’s treatment of human rights violations and its treatment of corruption,” said Dr Ranald. “The report says that China is a risky place to do business (p. xvii), and Australian companies need a transparent process for registering and pursuing complaints about corruption and unreasonable regulation,” said Dr Ranald.

“We urge the government to be consistent, to take the recommendations on human rights and labour standards seriously, to raise these issues in the FTA negotiations and to apply the same standards to human rights violations as to corruption by establishing a similar process for registering and pursuing human rights violations” added Dr Ranald.

The report is available at

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/fadt_ctte/china/report01/index.htm

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